

FINDINGS: Serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities, as well as disfavored Muslims, remain widespread in Egypt. The reporting period marked a significant upsurge in violence targeting Coptic Orthodox Christians. The Egyptian government has not taken sufficient steps to halt the repression of and discrimination against Christians and other religious believers, or, in many cases, to punish those responsible for violence or other severe violations of religious freedom. This increase in violence, and the failure to prosecute those responsible, fosters a growing climate of impunity. Implementation of previous court rulings – related to granting official identity documents to Baha'is and changing religious affiliation on identity documents for Christian converts – has been limited and subject to onerous delays. Disfavored Muslims continue to face discrimination and repression. The government has not responded adequately to combat widespread and virulent anti-Semitism in the government-controlled media. On a positive note, there was increased public space to discuss and debate a wide range of religious freedom concerns, including sectarian violence, in the media and other public fora, which, in previous years, was discouraged or prevented by Egyptian authorities.

Due to persistent and serious concerns, Egypt remains on USCIRF's Watch List in 2010. Egypt has been on the Watch List since 2002.

USCIRF traveled to Egypt in January 2010 to assess religious freedom conditions in the country. The visit took place just weeks after six Coptic Christians and one Muslim were killed outside a church on Coptic Christmas eve in the town of Naga Hammadi. This incident served as a wake-up call to many Egyptians about the government's inadequate response to growing sectarian tensions and other religious freedom issues. USCIRF concludes that there is a window of opportunity for the Egyptian government to conduct thorough investigations and to bring to justice perpetrators of sectarian violence before societal and government attention shifts to the upcoming parliamentary elections later in 2010 and presidential elections in 2011. Other needed reforms also should be immediately implemented, such as removing religion from official identity documents and passing a unified law for the construction and repair of places of worship.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: U.S. policy towards Egypt does not adequately prioritize human rights and religious freedom. Despite documenting widespread abuses in the annual human rights and religious freedom reports, the United States has not pressed the Egyptian

government sufficiently in numerous areas of concern. The U.S. government should establish a timetable with Cairo for implementation of human rights and religious freedom reforms. If deadlines are not met, the U.S. government should reconsider its allocation of its assistance to the Egyptian government. The United States should more aggressively press the Egyptian government to prosecute perpetrators responsible for sectarian violence and to remove *de facto*

responsibility for religious affairs from the state security services, with the exception of cases involving violence or the advocacy of violence. The U.S. government also should do more to support, without vetting by the Egyptian government, Egyptian civil society groups who are pressing for political and democratic reform. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards Egypt can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Egypt and by following this link:

<http://www.uscirf.gov/images/ar2010/egypt2010.pdf>